

Zoos and other prisons – not vegan, not ‘conservation’, not ‘education’

From [There's an Elephant in the Room](#) blog

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Zoos and aquariums are just two types of place where members of nonhuman species face lifelong incarceration for the ‘entertainment’ of our species. Many with vested interests are quick to claim that the ‘entertainment’ aspect is only part of the story; that the main reason for imprisoning other species has something to do with ‘education’ or about ‘conservation’, and there’s no doubt that both these words frequently allow a free pass from criticism or even critical thinking for these widespread and lucrative businesses.

Zoos, ‘wild life parks’, and sea world equivalents crop up frequently on social media and one doesn’t have far to look to discover that the folk myths about ‘education’ and ‘conservation’ are alive and well, and have been since long before the days of TV and film.

We may arguably live in at a time when the use of other animals is increasingly frowned upon as unethical in circuses, but meanwhile every family heading to look at imprisoned creatures for a day’s ‘entertainment’ is doing their bit – to the sound of cash registers and burger stalls – to reinforce the continuing message that humans are superior creatures and that other species exist for our entertainment.

I decided that it’s important to start to compile the best information and links into a single resource to be added to as more comes to hand, providing something to share when the subject is raised by those whose self interest blinds them to the facts. I start with a piece that I recently came across by the great Tom Regan. The other articles are in date order.

Are Zoos Morally Defensible?

1995. In this piece comprising a chapter of a larger work authored by others, Tom Regan (1938-2017) examines and discusses the ethics of zoos from the Animal Rights position, by providing valuable insights into how the sharply contrasting ‘utilitarian’ or ‘holistic’ stances affect the subject. He writes,

‘As will become clear as we proceed, my own moral position is not that of a neutral observer. Of the three tendencies to be considered, I favor one (what I call the “rights view”) and disagree rather strongly with the other two.’ https://d.lib.ncsu.edu/collections/catalog/mc00236_2596514_20201001_7045#

The Case Against Zoos

June 11 2021 ‘I find one statistic particularly telling about their priorities: A 2018 analysis of the scientific papers produced by association members between 1993 and 2013 showed that just about 7 percent of them annually were classified as being about “biodiversity conservation.”

People don’t go to zoos to learn about the biodiversity crisis or how they can help. They go to get out of the house, to get their children some fresh air, to see interesting animals. They go for the same reason people went to zoos in the 19th century: to be entertained.

A fine day out with the family might itself be justification enough for the existence of zoos if the zoo animals are all happy to be there. Alas, there’s plenty of heartbreaking evidence that many are not.’ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/11/opinion/zoos-animal-cruelty.html>

The neural cruelty of captivity: Keeping large mammals in zoos and aquariums damages their brains

September 24 2020 ‘Some people defend keeping animals in captivity, arguing that it helps conserve endangered species or offers educational benefits for visitors to zoos and aquariums. These justifications are questionable, particularly for large mammals. As my own research and work by many other scientists shows, caging large mammals and putting them on display is undeniably cruel from a neural perspective. It causes brain damage.’ <https://theconversation.com/the-neural-cruelty-of-captivity-keeping-large-mammals-in-zoos-and-aquariums-damages-their-brains-142240>

It’s Time to Stop Pretending Zoos Are Good for Animals

March 9, 2020 ‘We imagine the zoo as Noah’s Ark, preserving the last remnants of endangered species. And yet, [83%](#) of species in zoos are not endangered, or even threatened. Why are these animals kept, if the zoo is all about conservation? Of the few zoo animals that are endangered, almost none of them will be released into the wild — they’ve been bred and raised for the entertainment of humans, and would not survive in nature. But even if zoos were successfully preparing their animals for release on a grand scale, it would be an inefficient use of resources: [Conservation in the wild is far more effective than captive breeding](#), in almost all cases.

Going to the zoo to support conservation is like buying an extra load of groceries so you can donate \$3 to St. Jude at checkout. <https://tenderly.medium.com/its-time-to-stop-pretending-zoos-are-good-for-animals-ca72fd4599e5>

Zoos are outdated and cruel – it's time to make them a thing of the past

August 14 2019 'If zoos are so abysmal, why do they still exist on such a large scale? The answer is simple. Zooreaucracies and zoorocrats have a stamp collector's mentality and an appetite and preference to please the public with iconic and non-threatened species, leading to their needless captivity and "consumption" for entertainment.

In other words, the public come first and not the animals. Is that conservation? Zoos don't want you to know these facts because it would expose the fundamental flaws in the arguments they put out for their existence, and as a consequence merely prove that they're in the conservation of business and not in the business of conservation.'

~ Damian Aspinall, Conservationist <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/zoos-cruel-wildlife-conservation-species-a9056701.html>

Zoicide: Seeing Cruelty, Demanding Abolition

November 16 2018

- 'Zoos do not protect endangered species.
- By making them objects of entertainment, they may serve the opposite function.
- On average, zoos spend about 2-3 percent of their budgets on research. That's it.
- Zoos educate nobody. The didactics at most zoos are rudimentary at best.
- Zoos are unhappy places for animals. Like people, they want to be free and among their kind.
- The biggest threat to animals is habitat loss. So, what do zoos do? They sell McDonald's hamburgers, KFC, and every other kind of fast food grown on lands that could have been used to sustain wild populations of animals.' <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/animal-emotions/201811/zoicide-seeing-cruelty-demanding-abolition>

Are zoo animals happy? There's a simple empathy test we can apply

April 16, 2017 'If we are to continue keeping animals in confinement ... Making animals happier must be a top priority, and written into the budgets of zoo managers. Nevertheless, we need to remember that enrichment is just a Band-Aid solution. It serves, like the Valium given to SeaWorld's whales, to manage the symptoms. But it can't treat the underlying disease. Only freedom from captivity can really resolve the illness.' <https://www.salon.com/2017/04/16/are-zoo-animals-happy-theres-a-simple-empathy-test-we-can-apply/>

Do Zoos and Aquariums Promote Attitude Change in Visitors? A Critical Evaluation of the American Zoo and Aquarium Study

2010 'Modern-day zoos and aquariums market themselves as places of education and conservation. A recent study conducted by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) (Falk et al., 2007) is being widely heralded as the first direct evidence that visits to zoos and aquariums produce long-term positive effects on people's attitudes toward other animals. In this paper, we address whether this conclusion is warranted by analyzing the study's methodological soundness. We conclude that Falk et al. (2007) contains at least six major threats to methodological validity that undermine the authors' conclusions.

There remains no compelling evidence for the claim that zoos and aquariums promote attitude change, education, or interest in conservation in visitors

https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=acwp_zoae